

Tips for Working with the Media

Through media coverage of your events, your organization has an opportunity to promote the important prevention work that you do in your community, expand the reach of your message, and spread the word about **National Prevention Week**. The following are helpful tips for developing effective messages for the media, creating a media list, pitching your media products, and developing media outreach materials (e.g., radio scripts, op-eds, media alerts, press releases).

COMMUNICATE YOUR MESSAGE EFFECTIVELY

While working with the media, be prepared to tell your story and respond to questions. All media outreach materials should be concise and persuasive. Media outlets and reporters receive numerous pitches for stories every day, so your materials need to convince reporters quickly and effectively that your event will be a worthwhile story for their paper, website, blog, or broadcast.

Focus on the where, when, and why of your event when creating your outreach materials, and only highlight details that are relevant to current issues in your community. You will have time to share other important information with reporters during a follow-up call, interviews, and when they attend your event.

Another way to communicate your story to the media effectively is to create a set of key messages and incorporate them into all of your media outreach materials. Consider creating two or three short messages that highlight the mission or purpose of your event, your event's theme, and a call to action (see page 2 for an example). It's also helpful to create a list of important details to include in all materials, such as the event's date, time, and location, as well as partners, sponsors, and other pertinent information. Don't forget to include the National Prevention Week dates and themes!

Sample Message: “[INSERT COMMUNITY NAME]’s National Prevention Week [INSERT NATIONAL PREVENTION WEEK THEME] Health Fair will bring together community leaders, health care providers, community service organizations, mental health counselors, and treatment facilities on [INSERT DAY OF THE WEEK], May [INSERT DATE] at [INSERT ORGANIZATION] Community Conference Center from [INSERT HOURS]. The Health Fair will provide the [INSERT TOWN/CITY NAME] community with an opportunity to learn more about living a healthy lifestyle, participate in behavioral health screenings, and explore available local resources.”

If you or someone you know has personal or professional experience with behavioral health or prevention, you can also offer quotes along with the story or coordinate an interview with the journalist. Make sure to get permission before using a person's quote or providing their contact information to a journalist for an interview.

CREATING A MEDIA LIST

Promoting and publicizing your event may organically generate media interest, but the best way to receive coverage is to contact media outlets and reporters directly to let them know about your National Prevention Week activities. It's also important to be strategic and create a media list that targets those most likely to cover your event.

When drafting your media list, familiarize yourself with media outlets in your area and the reporters who are responsible for specific “beats,” or topics. Reporters who focus on your community's or neighborhood's news will likely cover your event, especially if it involves a large part of the community (like a rally, sporting event, or community clean-up). Reporters who cover health or public safety may be interested in your event if it focuses on healthy living and educating the public (like a community walk/run/bike ride, health fair, or field day). If your event involves elected officials or local leaders (like a town hall or mayor's lunch), news and political reporters may also be interested.

Your media list could include some or all of the following outlets:

- City-wide daily print newspapers;
- Community print newspapers (weekly or monthly distribution);
- Local online-only newspapers;
- Local TV news stations;
- Local radio stations;
- Community blogs and bloggers;
- Community print or online newsletters; and
- Community or neighborhood online forums.

Send your carefully tailored outreach materials via e-mail to the reporters who are most likely to cover your event. Most print and online newspapers provide reporters' e-mail addresses in their bylines or at the end of articles. If their e-mail addresses aren't listed, or you are trying to reach TV or radio reporters, search the “Staff,” “Contact Us,” or “Directory” sections of the outlets' websites. You can also try calling reporters directly, but because reporters are often on deadlines, out of the office investigating, or reporting on stories, e-mail is generally the best way to reach them.

HOW TO PITCH A STORY TO THE MEDIA

Pitch points are sometimes called an “elevator pitch”—what would you say about your group or organization if you had only an elevator ride to sell your story? What are the three or four most compelling points you can share that will make someone want to learn more? Everyone in your group or organization should be familiar with your “elevator pitch” and be able to explain your goals and mission, as well as the key facts and rationale behind your **National Prevention Week** event. The “elevator pitch” is not only useful for quickly describing your story to media personnel, but it's also a way to share the most important information about your group or organization to potential partners.

When you contact the media, consider using a mix of outreach methods (see next page) to grab the media's attention. Remember to provide your contact information or additional resources so reporters can follow up on the story.

DEVELOPING MEDIA OUTREACH MATERIALS

Different types of outreach materials are used for different media outlets in different situations. Below are explanations and templates that may help you create your own outreach communications. As you prepare your own media materials, remember to include information about **National Prevention Week** themes! Sample media material templates are available on the **National Prevention Week** website at <http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention-week>.

Media Material	Description	Submission Information	Timeframe
Live-Read Radio Scripts	A type of public service announcement (PSA) that can be distributed to radio stations and read by DJs on-air. Radio stations often announce live-read radio scripts in conjunction with upcoming community events or campaigns, and these scripts can be customized to fit your group's or organization's needs.	<p>Prepare a cover letter with event details.</p> <p>Submit your script to local radio stations that you've identified as appropriate for your intended audience.</p> <p>Contact the stations directly to find out the point of contact and preferred file formats for script submissions.</p> <p>Request to have your scripts read during relevant programming. You can ask to speak to a marketing or programming director who can help you pinpoint the best programming segments available.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the stations 2–3 months before your event. • Ask the stations to play your scripts during the 2–3 weeks leading up to your National Prevention Week event.

Media Material	Description	Submission Information	Timeframe
Op-ed	<p>An op-ed can be featured in traditional print media like your local newspaper, as well as in online publications. Submission does not guarantee that the op-ed will be published.</p> <p>Your op-ed should speak about issues that are important to you, as well as to the community. Your op-ed should be relevant to those who read it, so consider writing about topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The direct impact of substance use and misuse on your community; • Local statistics and local profiles; • Positive ways that local programs help prevent substance use and misuse and promote mental health (quoting local leaders and youth); and • The need for more prevention education, training, awareness, and resources, based on a recent success story or local tragedy. 	<p>Publications often have guidelines for op-ed submissions, such as length restrictions, submission dates, and preferred file formats. Identify the appropriate publication for reaching your target audience.</p> <p>Contact the editor of the opinion page or identify the best person to talk to about placing an op-ed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the newspaper 2–3 months before you hope to have your op-ed published, with the goal to be published 3–4 weeks before your National Prevention Week event. • Send a follow-up e-mail to the editor one week after you've submitted your op-ed. • Send a follow-up e-mail to the editor one month before your event as a reminder.

Media Material	Description	Submission Information	Timeframe
Media Alert	A media alert notifies reporters about your event and may serve as a reminder if they have heard about the event through your promotion efforts. It should be straightforward, brief, and include the basic details of the event.	Send the media alert to reporters and editors whom you've identified as those likely to be engaged in your event. Also send it to a broader list of reporters and editors who cover general news stories and happenings in the community.	Send the media alert 2–3 weeks before your event.
Press Release	<p>A press release covers basic information about your event and introduces a reporter or editor to your group or organization. Include the most important information in the first two sentences, such as the where, when, and why of your event, and place minor details at the end.</p> <p>This type of outreach should be informative and interesting, making the reporter want to learn more about your event. Include contact information for the specific point of contact at your organization for the event.</p>	Send the press release to reporters and editors whom you've identified as those likely to be engaged in your event, based on topics and issues they cover in your community or write about on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send the press release 1 week before your event. • When distributing the press release in advance, you may want to indicate that the press release is "Under Embargo" until a specific date and time when you want information about the event released. Alternatively, you may mark your press release "For Immediate Release."

Media Material	Description	Submission Information	Timeframe
Media Kit	<p>A media kit is a package for journalists who may attend your event and want background information on your group or organization, your event, and National Prevention Week. Include in your media kit all the information someone would need to write a complete story on your organization and event:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media materials (e.g., the press release or media alert); • Fact sheets; • Your group or organization's annual report; • Photos; and • Contact information. <p>Organize materials neatly into a folder that can be sent to the media before your event or handed out during the event.</p> <p>If reporters are on a tight deadline or are unable to conduct a full interview during your event, a media kit is the best way to share a large amount of information with them quickly.</p>	<p>Send your media kit to reporters who have expressed interest in your event, and to those who have responded to your outreach efforts but are unable to attend your event.</p>	<p>Send the media kit the week before your event, or provide it on-site on the day of the event.</p>

Tell the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) about your event and share your media coverage! Please provide the following information to SAMHSA's **National Prevention Week** Coordinator, David Wilson, at david.wilson@samhsa.hhs.gov.

- Your organization's name and website address
- A brief description of your event
- Topics addressed by the event
- Target audiences
- Date and time
- Venue name and address